UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

MAY 3 1999

OFFICE OF
SOLID WASTE AND EMERGENCY
RESPONSE

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: National Remedy Review Board Recommendations for the W. R. Grace/Wayne Interim Storage Superfund Site

FROM: Bruce K. Means, Chair
National Remedy Review Board

TO: Richard L. Caspe, Director
Emergency and Remedial Response Division
EPA Region 2

Purpose

The National Remedy Review Board (NRRB) has completed its review of the proposed remedial action for the W. R. Grace/Wayne Interim Storage Superfund Site in Wayne Township, New Jersey. This memorandum documents the NRRB's advisory recommendations.

Context for NRRB Review

As you recall, the Administrator announced the NRRB as one of the October 1995 Superfund Administrative Reforms to help control response costs and promote consistent and cost-effective decisions. The NRRB furthers these goals by providing a cross-regional, management-level, "real time" review of high cost proposed response actions. The board reviews all proposed cleanup actions that exceed its established cost-based review criteria.

The NRRB review evaluates the proposed actions for consistency with the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) and relevant Superfund policy and guidance. It focuses on the nature and complexity of the site; health and environmental risks; the range of alternatives that address site risks; the quality and reasonableness of the cost estimates for alternatives; regional, state/tribal, and other stakeholder opinions on the proposed actions, and any other relevant factors.

Generally, the NRRB makes "advisory recommendations" to the appropriate regional decision maker before the region issues the proposed response action for public comment. The region will then include these recommendations in the Administrative Record for the site. While the region is expected to give the board's recommendations substantial weight, other important factors, such as subsequent public comment or technical analyses of response options, may

influence the final regional decision. It is important to remember that the NRRB does not change the Agency's current delegations or alter in any way the public's role in site decisions.

NRRB Advisory Recommendations

The NRRB reviewed the informational package for the proposed remedial action at the W. R. Grace/Wayne Interim Storage Site and discussed related issues with EPA project manager Angela Carpenter on March 9, 1999. Based on this review and discussion, the NRRB offers the following comments.

- The board supports the proposal to remove the radiologically contaminated materials from the site (alternative 4) and expects the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) to address contamination in the clay layer to the maximum extent practicable (without breaching the layer). However, there remains the possibility that the Corps would need to leave significant residual contamination in the clay layer in order to avoid a possible breach. In this situation, the Corps should evaluate the potential for contaminants in the clay to leach to the aquifer below, and modify the remedy to address any significant leaching threat (e.g., establish institutional controls to prevent exposure to the contaminated materials, stabilize/treat the day layer to reduce the migration potential, and/or implement a groundwater contingency remedy if the contaminants in the clay have the potential to affect area groundwater resources).

- The board also supports the proposal to monitor the groundwater during and after implementation of the remedial action to determine the effectiveness of the action. If contaminants are found to exist at unacceptable levels, a groundwater contingency remedy should be implemented with the goal of protecting area-wide groundwater resources.

- The information presented to the board did not describe or cost out several activities that may be necessary to implement alternative 4 (the preferred alternative). For example, the Corps may need to stabilize and treat the day layer that separates the contaminated media from the aquifer below, address possible artesian flow conditions, and/or account for increased analytical quality assurance efforts. The board recommends that the Corps address these possibilities during design.

- While the board notes several issues regarding the presentation of information on alternatives 3 and 5 (below), it also recognizes that there is currently broad-based stakeholder support for the prefered alternative (alternative 4). Thus, the board recommends that the following issues be addressed in the proposed plan and ROD only to the extent these issues may practically alter the proposed decision outcome; that is, the Corps should not delay the action to address these issues should the additional analyses be judged peripheral to the key remedy selection issues at this site:

    -- Based on experience with removal actions at this site, and with actions taken at other similar radiologically contaminated sites in this and other regions, the board would not expect excavated soil volumes to differ as dramatically between alternatives 4 and 5 as the Corps' estimates indicate (depending on the soil cleanup standard chosen (5 pCi/g vs 15 pCi/g for alternatives 4 and 5, respectfully)). Thus, the cost differential between alternatives 4 and 5 will likely be smaller than the Corps currently estimates.

-- Alternatives 3 and 5 utilize cap and soil cover, respectively, to contain construction debris, but do not address the extent to which New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection solid waste regulatory requirements may be ARARs.

-- Alternatives 3 and 5 did not assess the need to protect against future cap or soil cover erosion and/or scouring, which would be of particular concern at this site because of the long-lived radionuclides to be isolated.

-- The information presented to the board did not fully demonstrate that alternative 5 would adequately address a future groundwater contamination threat. This alternative apparently leaves contamination beneath a soil cover that may continue to serve as a source for continued local groundwater contamination.

The NRRB appreciates the region's efforts to work closely with the Corps, the state, and community groups at this site. The board members also express their appreciation to the region for its participation in the review process. We encourage Region 2 management and staff to work with their regional NRRB representative and the Region 2/6 Accelerated Response Center in the Office of Emergency and Remedial Response to discuss any appropriate follow-up actions.

Please do not hesitate to give me a call if you have any questions at 703-603-8815.

cc: S. Luftig
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